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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN NIGERIA POLITICAL TIDBITS THROUGH
SEPTEMBER 2006

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) Summary: These snippets of political information from southern Nigeria are offered for their insights into the politics of the region. End Summary.

Another Voice Saying the EFCC Has Lost Its Way

2. (C) In a late September conversation, Ambassador Vincent Okobi, who is also an important traditional ruler in Delta State, asserted the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was tendentious from its very inception. He recounted being instrumental in pushing policies that led to the commission's establishment. He was so active that, at one point, he was the leading candidate to head the EFCC. His appointment letter had even been drafted, he recalled. But at the eleventh hour, he was summoned to an audience with some of the President's advisors. They found him too independent-minded, Okobi recalled. Then they tore his letter and picked current EFCC Chairman Ribadu in his stead. Ribadu was hired to do the President's bidding, Okobi concluded. (Comment: Okobi's remarks were more personal than those of most of our other interlocutors and thus tinged with trace elements of bitterness. Nevertheless Okobi's judgment about the EFCC is increasingly representative of the mood of most Consulate political contacts. End comment.)

Lawyer Sees No Responsible Presidential Candidate

3. (SBU) Well-respected lawyer and human rights activist Nurudeen Ogbara told Poloff that he and others in the Nigerian Bar Association are watching and waiting for a Presidential candidate to emerge. Ogbara pointed to Senate Speaker Ken Nnamani as a candidate who might fit the bill. Human rights in Nigeria are very weak, and the Federal Government has done little to strengthen them, the lawyer said. Ogbara believes that the removal by Obasanjo of Bukhari Bello, Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission was politically motivated, and called Folashade Ajoni, appointed to replace Bello, a mere figurehead.

Two Connected Businessmen See a Buhari Presidency

¶4. (SBU) In two separate discussions with Econoff, Ignatius Ukpaka, Managing Director of Bank PHB, and Jean-Pierre Snijders, Chief Regulatory Officer at Celtel, foresaw a scenario in which former President Muhammadu Buhari would switch allegiance to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and run for President with Obasanjo's blessing. Both seasoned observers of the political scene predicted that Obasanjo would favor Buhari as a former military man most able to control the country and continue the reforms he had initiated. (Comment: Rumors of a Buhari switch to the PDP are now common fare in the Lagos political circles. However, most observers think this as highly unlikely. End comment.)

South-South: Bayelsa to Resettle Bakassi

¶5. (C) 5,000 Nigerians who decided to leave the Bakassi Peninsula when it was ceded to Cameroon may be resettled in Bayelsa, according to Foster Ogola, the Governor's Special Advisor on Investment and Economic Issues. Governor Goodluck Jonathan has agreed to provide 15 hectares on which the refugees will be resettled. Currently, the refugees are housed in secondary schools and makeshift tents. Ogola told PolOff that the Governor is seeking international assistance, thus far without success. The U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) considers the Bakassi pilgrims internally displaced persons, not refugees. UNHCR will accept a request for aid only from one of the Federal Government's refugee-related ministries. According to Ogola the GON is working to help, but has moved slowly.

South-South: No Community Input to Rivers Projects

¶6. (U) Pol/Econoff attended the weekly meeting of the Rivers State Sustainable Development Project (RSSDP), an ambitious economic development initiative launched by Governor Peter Odili many months ago. The working group, which included the Rivers State Attorney General, the Advisor to the Governor on Special Issues, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and USAID officer, discussed next steps for implementation of short-term Quick Results Projects (QRPs). The projects, which include micro-financing for aquaculture and a rural telephone project, are not slated to begin until January/February 2007. It was clear from the discussion that no attempts had been made to include local communities in the decision-making process for identifying projects. This could become a problem when community support will be called for during the implementation of these projects.

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BROWNE